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AMYCUS AND CÉLESTIN

PROSTRATED on the threshold of his wild grotto, the hermit Célestin passed in prayer the vigil of Easter, this angelic night during which trembling demons are precipitated into the abyss. And while darkness covered the earth, at the hour when the angel exterminator soared over Egypt, Célestin shivered, overcome with anguish and terror. He heard afar off, in the forest, the cries of wild-cats and the flutey voices of the frogs: plunged in deepest gloom he doubted whether this glorious mystery could be accomplished. But, when he saw the day dawning, joy with the light entered his heart; he knew that Christ was risen, and he cried:

"Jesus is risen from the tomb; love has vanquished death, alleluia! He rises radiant at the foot of the hill! Alleluia! Creation is made anew and redeemed: Darkness and evil are dissipated; grace and light are spread over the earth. Alleluia!"

A lark which awakened in the wheat-field answered him singing:

"He is risen. I have dreamed of nests and of eggs, of white eggs speckled with brown. Alleluia! . . . He is risen."

And the hermit Célestin left his grotto to go to a neighboring chapel, there to celebrate the holy Easter Day.

As he passed through the forest, he saw a fine beech-tree from whose swollen buds the little tender green leaves were already bursting; garlands of ivy and fillets of bloom hung from the branches, nearly touching the earth; votive tablets

attached to the knotted trunk spoke of youth and love, and here and there little clay cupids, their wings spread, their tunics flying, swung among the branches. At this sight the hermit Célestin bent his white eyebrows:

"It is the fairie's tree," he said to himself, "and the country girls have hung it with offerings according to custom. My life is passed in struggling against fairies, and no one would imagine the trouble these little people give me. Each year at harvest time I exorcise the tree according to the ritual, and I chant to them the Gospel of St. John.

"One can do no better, the holy water and the Gospel of St. John put them to flight, and no more is heard of them all winter; but they come back in the spring-time, and all must be done over again every year.

"They are subtil; a branch of hawthorne is sufficient to shelter a swarm of them. And they exercise their charms over the young boys and girls.

"Since I have grown old my sight has failed, and I do not see them very well any more. They make a jest of me, passing close before me and laughing in my face. But when I was twenty I could see them in the clearings, crowned with chaplets of flowers, dancing in the moonlight. Lord, thou who madest the skies and the dews, thy works praise thee! But why hast thou made pagan trees and fairy fountains? Why hast thou placed under the hazel the mandragora which sings? These objects of nature induce the young to sin, and cause fatigues with-

out number to the anchorites who, like me, have undertaken to make all creatures holy! If even the Gospel of St. John sufficed to drive away the demons! But it does not suffice, and I do not know what more to do."

And, as the good hermit went sighing on his way, the tree, which was a fairy tree, said to him in a soft rustling:

"Célestin, Célestin, my buds are eggs. Veritable Easter eggs! Alleluia! Alleluia!"

Célestin plunged into the forest without turning his head. He went forward with difficulty, by a narrow path beset with thorns which tore his robe, when suddenly, bounding from a thicket, a young lad barred his passage. He was half clad in the skin of an animal, and was more of a faun than a boy; his look was piercing, his nose a snub, his face radiant. His curled hair hid the two little horns on his narrow forehead; his teeth were sharp and white, blond hair grew in two points on his chin. A golden down shone on his chest. He was agile and light, his cloven feet were hidden in the grass.

Célestin, who was possessed of all the knowledge that meditation bestows, saw at once with whom he had to do, and he raised his arm to make the sign of the cross. But the faun, seizing his hand, prevented his finishing this powerful gesture.

"Good hermit," said he, "do not drive me away. Today is for me as well as for you a festival day. It would not be charitable to sadden me at Easter time. If you are willing we will walk along together, and you will see that I am not wicked."

Célestin was fortunately well versed in the sacred sciences. It occurred to him just then that Saint Jérôme had had for travelling companions in the desert

satyrs and centaurs who had confessed the truth.

He said to the faun:

"Faun, recite a hymn to God. Say: 'He is risen.'"

"He is risen," replied the faun. "And you see me rejoiced at it."

The path broadened, they went along side by side. The hermit walked pensively, saying to himself:

"He cannot be a demon since he has confessed the truth. I have done well not to grieve him. The example of the great Saint Jérôme has not been lost upon me."

And turning toward his young goat-footed companion he asked:

"What is your name?"

"I am called Amycus," replied the faun. "I live in this wood where I was born. I have come to you, my brother, because you have such a kindly air under your long white beard. It seems to me that hermits are fauns grown old. When I am old I shall be like you."

"He is risen," said the hermit.

"He is risen," said Amycus.

And, thus conversing, they climbed the little hill where stood a chapel consecrated to the true God. It was small and roughly constructed. Célestin had built it with his own hands from the ruins of a temple of Venus. Within, the table of the Lord stood plain and naked.

"Let us prostrate ourselves," said the hermit, "and sing Alleluia, for He is risen! And thou obscure creature, remain on thy knees while I offer the sacrifice."

But the faun, approaching the hermit, stroked his beard and said:

"Good old man, you are wiser than I and can see the invisible. But I know the woods and the fountains better than you. I will bring to the God the branches and the flowers. I know the banks where

the cress half opens its lilac blossoms and the fields where the cowslip blooms in yellow clusters. I can find by its light odor the mistletoe on the wild apple tree. Already a snow of flowers covers the branches of the blackthorn. Wait for me, Old Man."

In three goat-like bounds he was in the wood, and, when he returned, Célestin thought he saw a hawthorn bush walking. Amycus was hidden under the perfumed load. He hung garlands of flowers on the rustic altar: he covered it with violets and said gravely:

"These flowers, to the God who created them!"

And, while Célestin celebrated the mass, the goat-footed one, bowing to the earth his horned forehead, worshipped the Sun, saying:

"The earth is a great egg which thou makest fruitful, Sun, Sacred Sun!"

From this day Célestin and Amycus

lived together. The hermit could never, in spite of all his efforts, make the half-man understand the ineffable mysteries; but, as, by the care of Amycus, the chapel of the true God was always ornamented with garlands, and more covered with flowers than the fairy trees, the holy priest said:

"The faun is an hymn to God."

That was why he administered to him holy baptism.

On the hill where Célestin had built the simple chapel which Amycus ornamented with flowers from the mountains, the woods, and the waters, rises today a church, of which the nave dates back to the eleventh century, and of which the porch has been rebuilt, under Henri II, in the style of the Renaissance. It is a place of pilgrimage, and the faithful venerate there the blessed memory of the saints Amic and Célestin.

ANATOL FRANCE.

From Carnet Rose, Paris.

(Translation, Lotus Magazine.)

FRAGMENT

"Riches," says Charles Lamb, "are chiefly good, because they give us time, all one's time to one's self. For which alone I rankle with envy at the rich. Books are good, and pictures are good, and money to buy them is therefore good, but to buy time—in other words—life!" An illusion natural enough to an ill-paid clerk, ninety years ago, whose sole dissipations consisted in rambling through the leafy lanes of Hertfordshire, or "expanding over muffins" with Evans amidst the dusty tomes of the India House. In these days of hurry and push, when even idleness is eager, *riches*, instead of giving us time and leisure, filch them from us, and burden us with a number of useless responsibilities and ridiculous encumbrances.